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ABSTRACT

In 1972, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia instituted the Regents' Testing Program (RTP) to provide systemwide information on the status of student competence in reading and writing and to provide a uniform means of identifying those students who fail to attain minimum levels of competence in these areas. Since 1972, some modifications were made in testing policies and procedures as well as test content. Current policy requires that: (1) students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs shall pass the RTP as a requirement for graduation; (2) all students who have taken and not passed the RTP shall take the appropriate nondegree credit courses in remedial reading and/or writing in each quarter of attendance until they have passed all components of the test; (3) having passed the RTP shall not be a condition of transfer to another institution; and (4) students whose mother tongue is other than English may be exempted from taking the RTP provided appropriate local procedures are employed to certify the literary competence of those students. The test itself includes a reading test with 10 passages of varying length, covering subjects from natural science to the arts, and an essay test on the student's test on the student's choice of one of two topics. Each institution is responsible for administering the RTP and sending test materials to the Regents' Testing Office (RTO) for scoring. At the RTO, the reading tests are scored by computer, while the essay tests are graded holistically by three graders. The RTO provides results to the individual colleges, which then report scores to the students. (RO)

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# FOURTEEN YEARS OF ASSESSMENT: REGENTS' TESTING PROGRAM

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Fourteen Years of Assessment: Regents' Testing Program

Jean Bolen Bridges

By a policy statement issued in 1972 the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia instituted the Regents' Testing Program. This program serves as one means by which the thirty-three colleges and universities within the University System can ensure that students receiving degrees possess "literary competence," defined as "certain minimum skills of reading and writing." The Regents' Testing Program or RTP or Regents' Test as it is best known is composed of two parts, a reading test and an essay test.

History of Test

The development of the Regents' Test has its origin in the 1960's before the subject of accountability has become a national preoccupation. The Chancellor of the University System had been instrumental in defining a core curriculum for the first two years of the college experience. The colleges submitted their core curriculum for approval and a handbook for the University System was compiled. Transfer was easier for the student and administration. Also, there was interest in ascertaining what skills had been acquired by those students who took the core courses. During 1968-69 samples of students were tested using the College Level Entrance Examination (CLEP) in the interest of measuring skill in the three core areas of Humanities, Social Science, and Math/Science. In the spring of 1970 the Survey of College Achievement was administered in lieu of the CLEP because it required less time to administer. It was not a requirement for graduation but was an assessment for the colleges to check their performance. However, since the courses taken to satisfy the core requirements varied from institution to institution this assessment was not believed

to be as useful as once thought.

The notion of testing only reading and writing came out of deliberations between the Chancellor and the Presidents of the institutions in the University System during the spring of 1970. Since reading and writing skills were judged to come within the province of the Academic Committee on English, which is an advisory committee composed of English department heads or representatives from the 33 schools. A testing Subcommittee was appointed from this advisory committee to work with testing experts on the development of a test to measure reading and writing competency.

The testing subcommittee and testing experts devised an experimental version of the test which had three parts: an esay, a multiple choice test of writing and grammar and a multiple choice test of reading comprehension. The essay topics were selected and approved by the Academic Committee on English. Examinees were given thirty minutes to write on one topic, and thirty minutes to work on each of the two multiple choice components. This Rising Junior test was administered to samples of students in the spring of 1971, and it was formally administered systemwide in the winter of 1972 to the System's Rising Juniors, those who had between 60 and 75 hours of college credit.

As this test was being formulated, the Board of Regents was formulating a policy statement about the testing program which it called the University System Regents' Testing Program. This statement, issued in 1972, described the purposes and procedures for the Program.

The objectives were two-fold: (1) to provide System-wide information on the status of student competence in the areas of reading and writing; and (2) to provide a uniform means of identifying those students who fail to attain the minimum levels of competence in the areas of reading and writing.

Since 1972, some modifications have been made in the policies and procedures as well as the content. In 1973 passing two of the three parts of the test became a graduation requirement. In 1974 the objective test on grammar and writing was dropped. The essay test was then changed to give the student a choice between two topics and the time extended to 45 minutes. At the same time passing both parts of the exam became a graduation requirement. The time limits for the essay were extended to one hour for both the reading and essay tests in 1978.

In 1979 the Board of Regents established the eligibility requirements for the test. The current policy requires that:

A. Students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs shall pass the Regents' Test as a requirement for graduation. Students, including transfer students and/or readmitted students, may take the Test after they have completed the required basic core English courses. They may be required to take the Test in the quarter after they have earned 45 hours of degree credit if the Test has not been passed previously. Institutions, however, may not delay initial testing beyond the student's having earned the 60th hour of degree credit.

B. All students who have taken and have not passed the Regents' Test during the quarter in which they will have earned 75 hours of degree credit shall take the appropriate nondegree credit course(s) in remedial reading and/or remedial writing in each quarter of attendance until they have passed all components of the Test.

C. Having passed the Regents' Test shall not be a condition of transfer into an institution. All transferring students from within the System shall be subject to all provisions of this policy. Students from institutions outside the System who transfer into a System institution with 60 or more degree credit hours shall take the Test during the initial quarter

of enrollment and in subsequent quarters shall be subject to all provisions of this policy.

D. Students whose mother tongue is other than English may be exempted from taking the Regents' Test by the institution provided appropriate local procedures are employed to certify the literacy competence of those students earning a degree.

E. For extraordinary situations, each institution shall develop special procedures for certifying the literacy competence of students. A written description of those procedures shall be submitted to the Chancellor for approval. A record of the action shall be reported by the Chancellor to the Education Committee of the Board of Regents. Such procedures shall include provision for remediation if needed and formal examination prior to certifying competency. Such examination shall equal or exceed the standards of the Regents' Testing Program.

F. A student may request a formal review of his failure on the essay component of the Regents' Test if that student's essay received at least one passing score among the three scores awarded AND if the student has successfully completed the courses in English composition required by the local institution.

Contents of Test

The reading test has ten passages varying in length from 175 to 325 words in length, covers subjects from natural science to the arts, and entails various modes of discourse. The 5 to 8 questions that follow each passage asseses four areas of reading ability: vocabulary, literal comprehensive, inferential comprehension, and analysis. The skill categories have been defined and appear in Table I.

The essay test is one essay written by the student on his choice of two topics. The following directions are given to the student:

## LANGUAGE SKILLS EXAM
## ESSAY
(60 Minutes)

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER ☐☐☐-☐☐-☐☐☐☐

General Directions: The purpose of this test is to find out how well you can write an essay. You have a choice between two topics. Having read the short statements or questions which tell you what each topic is about, decide which you prefer and mark an "X" in the box which follows that topic statement or question. You will, of course, choose the topic on which you feel you can do your best writing. You should first organize what you want to write; then begin writing on the first lined page.

Listed below, along with some information, are a few suggestions which will help you do your best on the essay.

1. Start planning your paper as soon as you have decided on your essay topic. You may use the space underneath the topics for making an outline or notes about your plans.

2. Organization of your essay is important. Think toward a good thesis sentence, some specific supporting points, and a definite conclusion. In general, the passing essay will require that you (1) state and develop a central idea; (2) have an organization which is indicative of an overall plan; (3) deal with the assigned topic; and (4) avoid serious errors in diction, sentence structure, and paragraph development.

3. Allow yourself a little time at the end of your writing to check your paper and make any needed changes. Watch your handwriting, as an evaluator must be able to read your paper.

4. Your paper will be read and evaluated by three different readers. Neither your identity nor your school will be known to the readers.

Choose one of the following; put an "X" in the box to indicate your choice.

ESSAY TOPIC

☐

ESSAY TOPIC

☐

Administration and Scoring of Test

Each institution is responsible for administering its test. Materials are sent to the Institution's test coordinator, and the test is given on the same two days systemwide. An administration Manual is provided which details the procedures so that all test administrations are standardized. The testing office also periodically monitors the administration sites. All test materials are sent directly to the Regents' Testing Office so that they can be scored.

The reading test is scored by computer and the raw score is translated to a scale score. Currently the passing reading score is 61. The writing part of the test is scored by raters at six scoring centers on two successive Saturdays following the test period. The students are identified only by social security numbers. Each essay is graded independently by three grades who use the holistic procedure: When rating, the graders use a four-point scale: 4 which means a superior essay; 3 which means a strong pass; 2 which means a safe pass; and 1 which means fail. Graders begin each scoring session with some practice essays selected by the Testing Subcommittee which meets the weekend each quarter immediately following the administration of the test and before the grading actually occurs. There is a grading manual for new graders; and graders are ranked at the end of each academic year. Two of the grades must be passing if the student passes the essay. A student may appeal his essay grade. The testing subcommittee at its quarterly meeting regrades these essays; approximately one half do pass.

Score Reporting

Within the three-week period following a quarterly administration of the Regents' Test, each insitution in the University System is issued a Report of Results. In an institution's Report, data are provided that

describe the test performance of each student from the institution who participated in the quarterly administration of the Regents' Test. Also provided to each institution is an Institutional Summary Report, which includes the following information: a summary of the performance of the institution's examinees on the Reading Test and the Essay Test for first-time examinees, repeaters, and these two groups combined; a description of the institution's performance on each skill category of the Reading Test; and, to facilitate year-to-year comparisons, an historical summary of results for first-time examinees and repeaters. To allow comparisons with similar institutions, various statistics are reported by institutional type (university, senior college, and junior college). Also provided is a report of the test performance of students at each institution in the System. Personnel at each institution are responsible for reporting scores to individual students.

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